

History

Kanem-Bornu: The Historical Background

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THIS BOOK is primarily an account of the way of life of a contemporary African people. However this particular group, unlike many others in Africa or elsewhere, has an ancient and well-documented history. The fact that such materials are available also means that we can observe the kingdom as it developed through time and obtain some appreciation for its continuity and change as one of the oldest political powers in Africa. I have therefore tried to bring together in summary form an account of Bornu history and its political development during the last millenium of southern Saharan history. In terms of the overall ethnographic task it is important to realize that it is within this historical stream that the contemporary way of life has come to be what it is. Indeed one of the most salient facts about Kanuri culture is the pride the people feel in their history; they believe that one cannot know them unless there is at the same time some understanding of their past. In order to do this I have written first an outline of the major events of this history, then analyzed the political development of the kingdom as it evolved through time. The details of the present political system are then taken up again in Chapter 6.

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Kanuri legends all take the Bornu kingdom back to the north and northeast of Lake Chad to the ancient kingdom of Kanem and before that to Yemen. Like many peoples of West Africa as far removed from one another as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Fulani of Futa Djallon in Guinea, Kanuri traditions suggest that they as a people come originally from Yemen. It is said that a migrant Yemenite noble named Sef founded the royal dynasty of the Magumi Sefuwa. There is very little doubt that the ancient dynasty of the Sefuwa has been in fact the ruling line in Kanem-Bornu for over a thousand years. However, there is very little evidence except for the legend itself to support the theory that the Kanuri or their ancient leaders originate in Yemen.

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The problem of studying human origins scientifically is a fascinating one, but there are many pitfalls and a keen taste for skepticism is a primary requirement. The rules of the game are, however, quite easy. Simply ask what valid facts

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are available, then try for the best explanation knowing that new facts will very probably force a change in the historical picture you have created to best explain the facts. The greater the number of facts, the fewer the possible number of different historical interpretations that can be applied to any particular case. With these rules in mind let us examine briefly what facts are at hand to help us with Kanuri origins.

First of all we have the Kanuri legends themselves which state that they came originally from Yemen—a legend they share with most of the Muslim people of the western Sudan. Let us call this the local theory and come back to it after considering other available facts. Subsistence farming and cattle keeping came into the area of the central and western Sahara about 5000 years ago, as evidenced by a number of archaeological sites in the area. At that time the Tibesti region north of Lake Chad was much wetter and the lake itself was enormous. It stretched well into the Sahara desert, especially into a region just south of the Tibesti known as the Bodele depression, which even today is well below the present level of Lake Chad itself. People settled in this region and utilized both domesticated plants and animals for their basic means of subsistence. Since that time, however, there has been a steady desiccation of the central Sahara which has dried up the Tibesti and the Bodele depression while the water has retreated in a southwesterly direction towards the present site of Lake Chad. As late as 500 B.C. merchants from Carthage were voyaging to the Tibesti to trade with people who lived in a wet climate among crocodiles, hippopotami, and giraffes.¹ Certainly what evidence we have suggests a very ancient trade between the people of the entire Sahara and those of North Africa. This was much expanded by the introduction of the camel sometime in the first or second century A.D. which facilitated trade across much drier portions of desert and over much longer distances. If we add to this evidence the fact that the Kanuri language is related to the central Saharan group of languages—and these are as a group only very distantly related to all other African language families—then a picture or at least a theory begins to emerge. [174] [173]

The Neolithic agriculturalists in the southern Sahara were drawn further south between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. as the waters of the desert began to recede southward.² As they moved southward they pulled the Saharan trade with them, and competition among groups in the Chad basin produced some differences in power and recognized status among clans who lived in the area. Leading lineages within these clans began to unite to govern the activities of clan members until finally the various clans formed loose federations with a leading clan and its leading lineage as the royal or kingly one.³ [197]

¹ See Rhys Carpenter, "A Trans-Saharan Caravan Route in Herodotus," *Journal of American Archaeology*, Vol. 60, 1956, pp. 231-42. [113]

² This process was also occurring in another area of "desert capture," the upper Niger bend where desert wet regions north of the river receded towards the south. The Niger itself bends into the Sahara, because like the Chad basin there are lowlands to the north of the great bend. Thus it is no accident that the Chad basin and the upper Niger bend have witnessed some of the earliest developments of centralized states in the western Sudan—they were the two areas into which the people of the desert could most naturally and easily move as desiccation proceeded.

³ In his book on Bunyoro, John Beattie very concisely defines a lineage as "all the descendants in one line (that is, either through males only or through females only) of a particular person through a specified number of generations. It differs from a *clan* in that while usually all the

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- 173 Given the fact that very many of the Muslim peoples of West Africa have legends concerning their origins in the Near East and often more specifically in Yemen, we can, I believe, think of the local origin theory as a mythical genesis story that is part of a widespread cultural heritage of the Muslim people of West Africa, likening it in this way to western stories about the Garden of Eden. On the other hand we do have "hard" linguistic evidence that the Kanuri people are related to peoples of the central Sahara northeast of Bornu. We also have very suggestive evidence from the geographic history that relates the people speaking these languages to one another and gives us grounds for positing immigration into the Chad basin and an increasing population density in the area. The exact details of this theory are matters for future research, but the major conclusion which places the origin of the Kanuri in the central Sahara seems to be a valid one.

174 At any rate, by the end of the first millennium A.D. the Muslim world outside the Sudan knew of the existence of Kanem, a sovereign state due south of Tripoli on the southern rim of the Sahara. Local traditions associated with the king lists (these have been collected periodically since 1850) assert that Islam came at least to the rulers of Kanem in the eleventh century. According to the traditions an eleventh-century Mai or king is supposed to have died in Egypt on his way to Mecca. Certainly by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Kanem became a well-known state in the Islamic world. Trans-Saharan commerce was completely controlled, garrisons were built to protect the trade routes, and treaty relations were established with the Hafsid rulers of Tunis. In the mid-thirteenth century a travelers' house for Kanem pilgrims was constructed in Cairo so that they might have proper accommodation while on the long journey to Mecca via Egypt. At the other extreme of the Islamic world, in Spain, a poet from Kanem was renowned in the court of El Mansur (1190-1214 A.D.) in Seville for his praise songs of the Sultan. This was a great period of Islamic civilization and Kanem played its part in that florescence.

175 From the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century a period of dark ages befell the kingdom. This is sometimes referred to as "the time of troubles." The dynastic chronicles indicate this period by including a great many rulers all holding sway for very short periods. The kingdom seems to have become a tempestuous stage for civil wars within and continuous attack from without. A letter to Cairo from this period has turned up, sent by a Kanem ruler, asking that the Caliph of Egypt send word to Sudanese Arabs who were helping Wadai to the east of Kanem raid amongst the people of Kanem for slaves even though such actions are considered to be against the precepts of Islam, since one must not raid for slaves amongst other Muslim peoples.⁴ The main source of trouble is supposed to have come from one particular group—the Bulala. These people were either an allied subordinate tribe or a clan whose leading lineage had split off from the Kanem royal line and had then grown in its independence and power until its leaders challenged the Kanem control of the kingdom.

members of a lineage know exactly how they are related to all the other members of it, and together, they often form a corporate group, clan members may not be able to trace genealogical links with other clan members, and often clansfolk are widely dispersed." See John Beattie, *Bunyoro: An African Kingdom*, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 3.

⁴ See R. H. Palmer, *Bornu, Sahara, and Sudan*, (London: John Murray, 1936), p. 195.

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Finally in the late fourteenth century, a rebellious Bulala group east of Lake Chad upset the Magumi Sefuwa rulers of Kanem, who ultimately came to the southwest portion of the Chad basin to establish what later became the empire of Bornu.

The collapse of the great Kanem empire in the fourteenth century is attributed by tradition to internal civil wars resulting from the Bulala revolt against the Sefuwa dynasty. The ultimate cause is rationalized in legend by an alleged irreligious act of the seventeenth king or Mai of Kanem, one Dunama, (ca. 1220-1260 A.D.) who is supposed to have "laid the foundations for the ensuing disaster of the empire by opening the sacred talisman of Bornu" which subsequently provoked men of ambition to entreat against the state.⁵ It may or may not be true, but it is very likely not the entire explanation even if we were to know what the "sacred talisman" was—which we do not; knowledge of its meaning and content have long since disappeared. Other reasons for the collapse of the kingdom besides that of a civil war against the Bulala can be suggested. The kingdom was in all likelihood not highly centralized and the nobles could quite easily unite, obtain outside help, and try to gain control. Indeed all of the traditions of the Bulala tell of them obtaining help from the Tubu of the central Sahara (a rebellious group who were tributary to Kanem) against the ruling Kanem dynasty.

Another factor is the nature of succession to the throne. Throughout the Sudan, and for as long as any traditions go back in Bornu, succession to the throne has always been open to those whose fathers have been monarchs. However, given many short reigns, this custom increases the number of contenders enormously and therefore exacerbates competition for royal office in the state so that the danger of civil wars and lack of unity is accelerated; the state is then much weakened as an effective political force. In other words, given a few short reigns, the possibility that more will follow becomes even greater unless a strong man with very strong backing emerges to quell the factions supporting various royal contenders. Finally it should be realized that Bornu was a much greener land than Kanem and it might have actually attracted the Kanem ruling group and their followers away from the drier, more inhospitable northern shores of Lake Chad. Certainly the kingdom of Kanem was not of such a nature that it suddenly collapsed when people (later to be called Kanuri) left. The Bulala clan assumed the leadership and Kanem continued as a sovereign state while the Kanuri tried, unsuccessfully at first, to reconquer their lost empire.

By the end of the fifteenth century the Sefuwa and their clan, the Magumi, had obtained sovereignty to the southwest of Lake Chad, and under a series of able monarchs they established their new kingdom of Bornu as a great power in the Sudan. The first of these rulers to organize and establish a really powerful state was a man named Ali Ghajedeni (ca. 1470-1500 A.D.), the forty-eighth monarch on the Sefuwa dynastic list. He built a new capital called Birni Ngazargamo, "the walled fortress," at the north end of Bornu and united this new kingdom under his control. Ali is supposed to have reconquered Kanem and re-established control over the Saharan trade while making war continually against Songhai to the west over the subjugation of the Hausa states and the east-west trade routes across the Sudan. His reign was followed by a series of others no less nota-

⁵ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, Vol. II, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1857), p. 637.

175 Kukawa while their slaves and subordinates administered their
563 lands and collected taxes. Slaves of the Shehu could them-
631 selves be chimas, and in fact some of the highest titles--
[567] those of Kalgama (a general of the army), and Mastrena (a
[554] eunuch) were reserved for slaves of the Shehu.

175 The "knights" of the Shehu were titled lords, who served
631 as his kabuna. Each lord also had his own kabuna, who vowed
563 allegiance directly to him. The kabuna of the lord actually
567 administered his lands while he lived in the capital. Many of
them were his slaves, but just as slaves of the Shehu could
themselves be powerful nobles, so too slaves of a lord who
were his kabuna were powerful individuals in the villages under
the jurisdiction of their lord. From his kabuna the lord se-
[632] lected the most trustworthy and rewarded them by having them
[622] appointed town heads (Lowan), or to a lesser extent village
heads (Bulama). The Lowan of a town was directly involved in
administering his town, in adjudicating disputes through arbi-
tration and in collecting the property tax (hara).

634 It was said that the chima was almost the absolute author-
173 ity in his lands. If he saw a horse that he wished to have or
642 a woman whom he admired, he could have them simply by indicat-
ing that he wanted to possess them. No man would refuse him

[643] directly. However, if reports came to the Shehu that a chima
was acting irresponsibly the Shehu could reprimand the man,
175 and could even remove his title from him. Any man could ap-
643 peal directly to the Shehu for justice. The power of the Shehu
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at different times, or may have become assimilated to Kanuri culture. A shatter-belt of small tribes, part-pagan and part-Moslem, and strongly influenced by Kanuri culture, rings Bornu Emirate. (These have been described in Chapter I.) North of Bornu are the Kanembu, closely related culturally and linguistically to the Kanuri, and with an inter-twined history that goes back to the Empire of Kanem, which preceded the Empire of Bornu.

[614] The Kanembu and the Kanuri share another set of jilis--which appear to be the remnants of patrilineal kin groups, or patri-sibs.

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The word jili will here be used in a very restricted sense to refer to the sib. Informants with an interest in the history of Bornu and with a strong historic sense relate that the jilis were no longer functioning in the days when Shehu Laminu ruled at Kukawa. Kanuri, Kanembu and all the sub-groups of Kanuri (Kwoyam, Mobber, Manga etc.) were sub-divided into jilis with

[304] the same names cross-cutting them. A child was of the same jili as his father, and each jili had its distinctive facial scars by which its members could immediately be identified.

The jili was not endogamous. Each jili had its common ancestor, whose name is known for every jili; each jili had as its head

[65] someone appointed by the Mai, or king. The primary function of the jili head was to collect taxes (haraji) from the people of

[643] his jili. The Mals of old were of the jili Magumi, the royal

[613] sib, and of the sub-jili Sef. All individuals of the sub-jili Sef are descended from Sef Isami who is reputed to have come

- 173 from Yemen, consequently the dynasty of the Mals of Bornu is re-
614 ferred to as the Sef dynasty. There are twelve such sub-jills
613 within the jill Magumi. If within the sub-jill Sef a man should
arise to great power and importance, his future descendants
would refer to him as the ancestor of their sub-sub-jill (line-
age) of the sub-jill Sef. One informant, who is Kanembu (but
culturally Kanuri), gave the following pedigree: Kanembu, jill
Kuvuri, sub-jill Kongana, sub-sub-jill Malam Shia. Malam Shia
was an important historic personage who is considered to be the
founder of the lineage which bears his name.

173 The Sef dynasty came to an end after the Fulani invasions,
643 and Shehu Laminu established the line of the present Shehus
614 though he himself never ruled as king. Shehu Laminu was Kan-
embu, of the jill Kuvuri. He was followed into Bornu by a num-
ber of Kanembu and Shuwa nobles, with their retinue, who assisted
[178] him in driving back the Fulani. Shehu Laminu was instrumental
in further reducing the role of the jills by appointing a Shetima
Kanuribe (Shetima is a noble title) as head of all the Kanuri,
replacing the various heads of the jills; he did the same for
the Shuwas under him.

614 Today everyone knows his own jill, and the jill of his par-
178 ents, which may and usually does differ, but the jill no longer
performs any social function. Few people can give their sub-jill.

- [643] Many of the jills today have a nominal head. The present Shehu
is obviously head of all the Kanembu Kuvuri. The head of the
Kanuri Magumi is the former Waziri Ibranim. The Shetima Kanuribe

174 80 miles of its bed in flood and boats being used in these seasonal
 133 (1) swamps. Carpenter feels that it was these wet lands south of the Fessan
 rather than the Niger that Strabo spoke of to Herodotus. It seems
 reasonable to suppose that as these enormous wet lands dried up central
 Saharan speaking peoples followed the course of this retreat and moved
 slowly over the centuries into the Chad basin, or at least concentrated
 more densely in this geographically favourable area.

175 Until more historical and archeological research has been
 carried out, it would be wise to neglect some of the later writers' fanci-
 ful reconstructions and to concur with the ever careful Barth, in speaking
 of the first centuries of the Kanuri kingdom as its "silent beginnings". (2)

175 Most scholars are agreed that the rulers of Bornu embraced Islam somewhere
 797 around the end of the 11th century. El Bekri writing circa 1067 A.D.
 (3) speaks of the people of Kanem as idolaters. However it is most likely
 that besides consulting merchants and travellers, he was consulting older

• (173) texts on the subject. The king lists all agree on the fact that Mai (king)
 Hume (1085-1097 A.D.) died in Egypt on the way to Mecca, and it is upon
 this evidence that Islam is at present dated in Bornu. (4)

(177) Urvey feels that this contact with Islam brought with it the
 knowledge of expansionism, powerful monarchy, and the idea of tributar-
 ies. (5) Whether this is true, or whether Islam only enhanced tendencies

175 already present is impossible to say at present. Whatever the answer, it
 642 is recorded that the son of the above mentioned Hume, Dunama I (1097-
 1150 A.D.) expanded the little state of Kanem, northeast of Lake Chad, into

(1) Carpenter, Rhys, op.cit. p. 239.

(2) Barth, H. Travels in North and Central Africa, Vol.II (London) 1857,
 p. 643.

(3) El Bekri, quoted in Barth, H. op. cit., p. 634.

(4) Urvey, Y. Chronologie du Bornu, Journal de la Société des Africanistes,
 12, 2, 1942, pp. 271-283.

(5) Urvey, Y. Histoire de l'Empire du Bornu, Mém. IFAN, 7, 1943, p.36

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[131] a large Empire with the result that Kanem became a well known state in the Islamic world of the 12th century. By the 13th century, Kanem had extended itself to include a large region in the Chad basin, including present day Bornu, and more importantly was in control of the central Sahara with its trade route to Tripoli. Friendship was contracted with the Hafsid rulers of Tunis, and we are told by Ibn Said writing at this time that a giraffe was sent by the King of Kanem to the Sultan of Tripoli as a present. He further notes that the practice of Islam is widespread amongst the population of Kanem at this time. Kachis Biri, the reigning monarch from 1242-43 A.D., ordered the construction of a traveler's house for Kanuri pilgrims in the city of Cairo. At the other end of the Muslim world, in Spain, a poet from Kanem was employed at this period in the court of El Mansur (1190-1214) at Seville, to sing the Sultan's praises. We are told by Lady Lugard that early references describe this person as a "learned and cultured poet, a black of the Sudan, Abu Iahah al Kanemi".

Although information on the internal affairs of Kanem is scarce for this period, these outward ripples indicate extensive contacts and peaceful relations between a well organized state and the rest of the Muslim world of the 12th and 13th centuries. Since the early Arabic travellers who came to Ghana, Mali and Songhai were often told of the existence of Kanem to the east, it can be assumed that contacts across the Sudan were kept up and utilized as much as the northerly ones.

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669 Local tradition in Bornu at the time of Barth's visit (1851) explained the eventual collapse of the great empire of Kanem in an interest-

- (1) Ibn Said writing of the rule of Dunama Ahmed (1221-1295 A.D.) says it included present day Bornu. Later writers claimed that Bornu reached to the Nile in this period. (See, Barth, H. op. cit. Vol. II, p. 641.)
- (2) Urvoy, Y. op. cit., 1949, p. 369.
- (3) Burckhardt, J.L., Travels in Nubia, (London) 1819.
- (4) Shaw, F.L., (Lady Lugard), op. cit. p 65.
- (5) See, Battutu Ibn, Travels in Asia and Africa, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London) 1929.

- 173 ing fashion. The legend claims that Dunama, the great 17th Mai of
 669 Kanem (1221-1259 A.D.) "laid the foundation for the ensuing disaster of
 the Empire by opening the sacred talisman of Bornu", for it (the talisman)
 called forth and provoked every powerful man to ambition and intrigues,
 and there followed after this reign a period of civil wars, and rapid
 changes in the monarchy, often involving regicide. It was at this time
 that the vassal state of the Bulala on the eastern boundary of Kanem grew
 towards an ever stronger independence, and finally toppled the Kanuri king-
 dom. We are told in the Chronicle translated by Barth that during the
 reign of the 27th Mai, Daud (1377-1386 A.D.) the Kanuri were decisively
 (131) beaten by the Bulala.⁽²⁾ By 1394 A.D., the 31st Mai, Omar (1394-1398 A.D.)
 finally gave up Kanem and came to Bornu proper to set up a kingdom in re-
 treat somewhere between the present city of Maiduguri and the town of
 Gujba.

There followed a period of unrest and internal strife for
 about 75 years, during which many kings took the throne and were in turn
 overthrown or murdered. The kingdom was in a constant state of civil war
 within and set upon by enemies from without.⁽³⁾ Palmer in his researches
 175 648 has found references to a letter sent at this time to Cairo from the Kanuri
 monarch, asking the Caliph to order the Arabs of Wadai to stop helping the
 Bulala raid amongst the Kanuri for slaves, since they (the Kanuri) were
 all good Muslims, and not infidels to be treated as potential slaves for
 the taking. More evidence of the "Sturm und Drang" quality of the period
 is indicated by the fact that a Mai of this time lived away from Bornu in
 the Hausa city of Kano which had been in the past a vassal state of the
 Kanuri empire.

(1) Barth, H., op. cit. Vol. II; King list, pp 633-671.

(2) Ibid; p. 634.

(3) Palmer, R. The Bornu Sahara and Sudan, (London) 1936, p. 218

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643 Borno in the 1820's. (1)

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(643) In 1835 Shehu Laminu retired and his son Umar (1835-1880) took over the effective headship of the Borno state. Like his father, he attempted to maintain and expand the kingdom, while keeping the old Mai on the throne. During one of Umar's western campaigns against Zinder, the puppet Mai, Ibrahim appealed to Wadai for help in restoring him as the rightful ruler of Borno against the Kanembu Shehu who had usurped the power. Umar returned from his Zinder campaign to find himself being attacked from the east by Wadai. Hearing of the Mai's instigation of this aggression, Umar put the puppet ruler in irons and tried to fight the Wadai forces at Logone, south of Lake Chad; but he was soundly defeated. Kuka was sacked, and the Wadai leader put Ali the young brother of the Mai on the throne. Umar, in high dudgeon, executed Ibrahim and bribed the Wadai forces to withdraw from Borno. The young Ali and his small following were now attacked and defeated, during which encounter Ali lost his life. And so ended the dynasty of the Magumi Sefuwa of Borno. Shehu Umar declared himself the sole ruler of Borno and rebuilt the city of Kuka which Barth

- 173 visited in the 1850's. Local tradition marks this occasion by telling how
643 Shehu Umar was the first of the Borno monarchs ever to sit on a chair.
644 Before this time leaders had always sat on rugs. It is also related of him that he took a member of the royal family, Ali Mairami, who was the son of a daughter of Mai Dunama (1810-1818), (i.e. he was not in line for the succession) and made him a Maisuli or joking king, who could joke with and chastise the Shehu in a manner prohibited to anyone else. This practice is still carried on today by the descendant of Ali Mairami in the court of the Shehu at Maiduguri.

(1) Denham, Dr. Clapperton H. Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, 1826.

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With minor disturbances, including one by the brother of Shehu Umar, in 1854, the Bornu kingdom maintained itself in a fairly stable condition, throughout the reign of Umar, and even afterwards during the reign of his son Bukr (1880-4). However trouble was soon to come from the east.

In the Bahr el Ghazal and Darfur region of the present independent Sudan, an adventurer named Rabeh was slave raiding under the power of the first Egyptian governor of the Bahr, named Zubeyr, in the 70's and early 80's. However Zubeyr's son Stiman headed a rebellion against Egyptian authority and was defeated, and his army disbanded. A remnant of this force headed westward under Rabeh who transformed this band of freebooters and pillagers into a disciplined army which, in the late 80's under the banners of the Mahdi, terrorised the Bahr el Ghazal, conquered

175 Nadai, and defeated the Baghirai kingdom east of Chad. In 1893, he engaged
721 the Bornu army near Ngala and vanquished it. Whereupon he entered a defeat-
727 ed Bornu and literally raped the countryside. From 1893-6, he despoiled the entire area, putting to death many of the leading [redacted] in Bornu who opposed him, and tried to spread his conquest as far [redacted] as possible. In this latter effort he was checked by a union of western forces and

175 refugee Kanuri at the present site of Geidam in northwest Bornu. After
643 1896 from his capital at Dikwa, Rabeh seems to have attempted a consolidation of the kingdom and due to these efforts at administration a more

• (173] moderate policy was followed. Nevertheless, his rule is remembered in Bornu
(661] today as the blackest period of their history. Old men are still alive who tell of the pillaging, burning, slave-raiding, killing and excessive extortion of the peasants, that was carried on during the "Rabeh period."

(1) c.f. Balfour-Paul, H.G. History and Antiquities of Darfur; Sudan Antiquities Service, Museum Pamphlet #3 Khartoum, 1955.

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Local traditions are fairly unanimous in attributing uity to this system of fiefdoms when the dynastic power changed hands at the beginning of the 19th century. Gradually the state began to be organised as it was of old, before the Fulani attacks, although now the fiefs were distributed amongst the family, courtiers, slaves and eunuchs of the Shehu.

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An early British report in Bornu indicates some of the dynamic (1) qualities of the fief system as it operated in pre-British Bornu. Tomlinson found that from 1893 to 1900 Rabeh had reduced the number of fiefs and for the most part placed them under his major lieutenants. (2) Being a stranger in a new land Rabeh had to keep his control as tight as possible and rely on a few trusted followers. Therefore the number of fiefs were reduced. Alternatively, when the Shehu was re-instated by the British and asked to help create "Districts" out of the old fiefs, he attempted to make as many of them as he could in order to obtain as large a body of followers as possible to consolidate his power.

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Although there is no mention made in any of the sources on Bornu, Kanuri informants claimed that the Chima Kura had the right to sell a fief if he so desired. Titled women were also given fiefs which were, as in the case of a male fiefholder, managed for them by slaves or servants in residence at the fief.

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The pre-British taxation system is remembered as consisting of two separate levies. One, the binturan collected in bintem (winter) was the property and organisational responsibility of the Chima Kura who owned the fief. Taxes were collected in kind at the local peasant level. The

(1) Tomlinson, F.J.P. Report of Nganzai District; 1918, in Prov. Office Maiduguri, Bornu, Prov. Nigeria.

(2) In a few cases, when the old Kanuri fiefholders declared allegiance to Rabeh, they were allowed to retain their fiefs. This occurred in the case of the fief of Magumeri in the 1890's.

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651 Chima Kura sent out a messenger from the capital to his representative in the fief, the Chima Gana, instructing him of the total demand of the levy. The messenger and the Chima Gana then raised the tax levy in the fief and extracted a surplus for their pains.

Part of this tax was given to the Shehu by the Chima Kura as sada'a (tithe). However, we are told that another tax was levied (also called the sada'a) which was specifically a royal revenue. Opinion differs as to the organization of the levy. Some sources tell of the king selling collection rights to trusted courtiers, while others refer to this tax as a special harvest tithe collected by the fief-holder and his representatives, partly for himself and partly for the king.

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[651] Within his holdings a fief-holder might use some of the area for his own purposes. For example, he might settle some of his slaves in a village and a large portion of the produce would come to him as his [792] rightful property. Or again, the fief-holder might give a segment of his holding to a mallam or a group of mallams (religious teachers and practitioners) so that they might have land to farm and support themselves. [103] Very often such a settlement would be mahram, i.e. tax exempt. These areas [621] can still be noted in Bornu today in the names of villages. A village called Karliyari, or slave town is the present site of one of the old slave settlements in a fief, while the name Mallamari for a town refers to its past history as a town of mallams or holy men.

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651 In the case of the vassal states which were subdued in war, a portion of the tithes collected by the local chief would always be sent off as tribute to the ruler of Bornu. To insure that this practice was carried out, the Bornu monarch often placed a servant or a slave (never a relative) in the capital of the vassal state. When Richardson reached Zinder in the 1850's, he found an Arab of Tripoli who had travelled widely

175 In response to this constant warfare, villages in
361 danger would 29.
712 either build near hills, to which they would retire in case of attack, if they lived in the south, or hide the site in a bushy place with barricaded and camouflaged entrance paths to the town. They would often build large covered holes with spikes at the bottom to stop intruders, especially raiders on horseback. Again, many villages would construct large mud-stocked walls for the same protective reason.

175 This pattern of constant warfare in Bornu is very old. The
721 contemporary record of the reign of Mai Idris Alooma, which has been pre-
128 served, is almost entirely an account of one military campaign after
175 another. Firearms have been used in Bornu for at least 400 years, and the
411 first request that Shehu Laminu made of the European explorers, who found
178 their way there in the 1820's, was for a cannon. (1) The interest in war-
175 fare by the leaders was reflected in the highly organized manner in which
726 warfare was conducted. Thus, before the battle witnessed by Denham, the
[701] Shehu inspected at military maneuvers of his troops. Each chief and slave commander (Kachella) had his own little "general staff" of close associates and when the order to advance on the enemy was given, each of these little "staffs" led their own groups forward. When the maneuvers were over, one of the groups was given the task for that day of watch and sentry duty for the entire camp.

173 Informants in Maiduguri recalled 24 Kachellas in pre-Babeh
701 Bornu. Each had a "regiment" of cavalry and foot-soldiers, and the army was drawn into two divisions, under twelve Kachellas per unit. The first
[644] was called the "house" force. It generally remained close to the Shehu, and its soldiers constituted a standing army or palace guard whose primary duty was the protection of the monarchy. The second division was called the "bush" unit, not because it fought outside the capital, but rather be-
(1) Ibid., p. 149.

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701 cause its soldiers were peasant subjects and rural followers of fief holders, whose homes were not in the capital but out in the Bornu countryside. In the pre-19th century military system, each of the four regional military leaders (the Yuroma, Mustrema, Kaigama, and Yerima) had under him a force of Kachellias, each of which in turn headed up a regiment of foot-soldiers and cavalry.

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727 Very often a diplomatic Bornu ruler, after having defeated his enemy in battle would assess the situation and try to decide whether or not the chief of the opposing side (if Mualis) was worth keeping. If not he was executed. But very often the rebel or enemy leader was humbled, then raised up after a defeat and encouraged to become a loyal vassal of the King of Bornu.

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726 It is also interesting to note that at least part of the morale of Shehu Laminu's army resided in the general belief in his supernatural powers as a military leader. The night before the battle witnessed by Denham it was reported that Laminu had written charms (verses from the Koran) and his enemies' spears and arrows were blunted and found so in the morning by their owners on the day of battle. Laminu was extremely anxious that Denham set off a rocket for him on the night before the battle, presumably for the same reason.

War itself was highly organized. The maintenance of the state required elaborate rituals and ceremonies to dramatize militarism, and the belief in the supernatural power of the leader or his religious associates helped maintain the morale of the army, which was also goaded on by a comprehensive system of sharing in the plunder. However, this tended to create for the average citizen an areal mobility not usually associated with peasant life in Africa. A man might return from the wars to his village on the borders of the state to find no village, nor wife, nor home,

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levelling processes between the two large segments of the society. It is because of this status aspect of class that Kanuri, like ourselves, have a ludicrous image of the arriviste - the person who has some of the attributes of upper class society, but who can never learn all of them, for he is not "to the manor born".

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This account of the social organization of Bornu has been heavily weighted towards the male society. This is due admittedly to the primary male associations of the anthropologist. However, it can also be put down to the strongly male-centred framework of the social structure.

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The dimensions of status discussed above, of tribe, occupation, wealth, birth, rural/urban residence and class, hold as well for women as for men. But for the most part (leaving aside highly independent women, who tend to create their own status) a woman's social position can be more fully understood by tracing her relationship to the various males in her patrilineage, and her married life. Briefly, a woman receives relatively high or low status from three sources, (1) her agnatic descent group and its status in the society, (2) the status of her husband, and (3) her personal wealth. The interrelation of these three factors changes through time for each woman as well as varying from woman to woman, but they are the basis of judgements by self and others which set a woman high or low in the society. It will be noticed that (1) and (2) both refer not to the woman's status, but to that of males to whom she is related either by marriage or descent.

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It is claimed that traditionally the women in Bornu were more highly organized than at present. There were titled heads to a total association of women, who were organized in similar manner to the

(1)
 173 guilds. The Ma'aram or Shehu's sister, and the Maira, the King's
 554 mother were the head women of the state. There was also a Do'oma or
 562 head of sower (unmarried divorced women) for the entire state, as well
 571 as the Gumau, the senior wife of the Shehu. Each town had its own
 [644] local head of women and head of the unmarried divorced women under the
 [574] titled heads in the capital. When visitors or an army regiment arrived
 the total community of women could easily be organized under their
 leaders to prepare food and proper lodging for the strangers. The
 titled women in the capital were invested to their offices in male robes.

178 The title Do'oma (head of sower) is said to have fallen into
 554 disuse after the fall of the first dynasty at the beginning of the nine-
 562 teenth century, but was revived in 1925 by Shehu Sanda. It exists today
 [644] but has no reference to sower. Informants around the palace claimed
 that except for the title of Maira (Queen Mother, but now held by any
 senior patri-female relative of the Shehu), the Gumau (the Shehu's sen-
 ior wife) chooses the women to receive the titles of Ma'aram and Do'oma.

554 Although it was not observed, informants claimed that at big celebra-
 562 tions of state, the titled women must wear their men's robes of office,
 527 men's hats, and walk with their special men's sticks. This ceremonial
 transvestism emphasizes the congruency of nobility, authority, and
 prestige with maleness.

554 In contemporary Bornu, the word ma'aram has come to mean
 562 the local head of the unmarried women, who are not linked very closely
 [431] into any overall state organization. It is customary for the women when
 they marry to give her a small payment, fataks (Kanuri for two shillings)
 which the men give to the Lawan (Village Area Head) before the marriage.

[476] The women are organized as a semi-formal work force under the ma'aram
 for quite traditional purposes.
 (1) See below pp. 269-270.